

# Can I Change My Benefit Option or Beneficiary Designation After I Retire?

The actual provisions governing retirement benefits are found in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), and federal laws and rules. This publication is only a summary. If there are any conflicts between the information provided here and what is contained in the law, the applicable law will govern. For legal advice, please consult an attorney or other qualified adviser.

Once you are retired, you have the ability to change your benefit option or beneficiary designation only in certain situations. These options apply to retirees of the following retirement systems and plans:

- Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) Plan 1, 2 and 3
- Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) Plan 1, 2 and 3
- School Employees' Retirement System (SERS) Plan 2 and 3
- Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' (LEOFF) Plan 2
- Washington State Patrol Retirement System (WSPRS) Plan 2

The rules for changing a benefit option or beneficiary designation are different for retirees of LEOFF Plan 1 and WSPRS Plan 1. Please contact DRS at the numbers listed on page 2 if you have questions about these plans.

## When Can I Change My Benefit Option or Beneficiary Designation?

There are three situations in which you can remain in retirement status and change your benefit option or designate a new beneficiary. All three situations require some action on your part to take effect.

### Situation 1: You selected a survivor benefit option and your beneficiary dies before you.

If you select a benefit option at retirement that guarantees a continuing benefit to your named beneficiary and your beneficiary dies before you, your benefit payment can be increased to the "Standard Option" (single lifetime benefit) payment. For TRS Plan 1, the payment can be increased to the "Maximum Benefit" payment. The change in benefit amount will begin the month following the date of death of your beneficiary. **Note:** If your designated beneficiary dies, you cannot name a new beneficiary to receive the survivor benefit.

#### How to request this change

You can request this benefit increase by contacting DRS by phone or by mail and providing a copy of the death certificate. See page 2 for DRS address and telephone information.

### Situation 2: You selected a survivor benefit option and named someone other than your spouse as a beneficiary.

If you select a benefit option at retirement that guarantees a continuing benefit to a named beneficiary other than your spouse, you can choose to remove this beneficiary. If you do, your benefit payment will increase to the "Standard Option" (single lifetime benefit) payment. For TRS Plan 1 members, your benefit payment will increase to the "Maximum Benefit" payment. **Note:** If you remove a beneficiary under this rule, you cannot name a new survivor beneficiary.

#### How to request this change

You can have your non-spousal beneficiary removed by contacting DRS in writing. See page 2 for DRS address information. Be sure to include your signature and Social Security Number in the letter.

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### **Situation 3: You selected a “Standard Option” (single lifetime benefit) when you retired and then married after retirement.**

If you select a standard option at retirement that pays a benefit for your lifetime and then you get married after retirement, you have the option to name your new spouse as beneficiary during a designated one-year window. If you change to a survivor option, your monthly benefit will be actuarially reduced to provide for a continuing benefit to your surviving spouse. This option can be used only once and is irrevocable. **Note:** This option is not available if your benefit payment has been attached by a court-ordered property division.

#### **You have a one-year window for selecting a new option**

The window opens on the day of your first wedding anniversary and closes on the day before your second wedding anniversary.

#### **How to request this change**

1. Contact DRS to obtain an application form. You will need to provide the following information:
  - Your Social Security Number
  - Your marriage date
  - Your spouse’s birth date
2. DRS will send you the application form along with an estimate of the monthly benefit you will receive after making the change.
3. If you want to proceed, send a letter to DRS during the one-year window and include the following:
  - Your completed application
  - A copy of your marriage certificate
  - A copy of your spouse’s birth certificate
4. After DRS has received all the items, your change will be processed.

#### **Where Can I Learn More?**

If you select a survivor option for your spouse at retirement and later become divorced or legally separated, a property division order may cancel this designation. For details, please see the publication, *How Can a Property Division Affect My Retirement Account?*

For information about the rules that apply to retirement from your system and plan, please refer to your Member Handbook which is available from your employer or DRS. Electronic copies of these handbooks are available on the Member Publications page on the DRS Web site at <http://www.drs.wa.gov>.

#### **DRS Mailing Address**

Department of Retirement Systems  
Name of your System (PERS, SERS, TRS, LEOFF or WSPRS)  
PO Box 48380  
Olympia WA 98504-8380

#### **DRS telephone, email and Web contacts**

- Outside the Olympia area call toll-free at: 1-800-547-6657
- In the Olympia area call: (360) 664-7000
- Send email to: [recep@drs.wa.gov](mailto:recep@drs.wa.gov)
- Visit the DRS Web site at: <http://www.drs.wa.gov>